DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 300 UD 034 078

AUTHOR Roderick, Melissa; Nagaoka, Jenny; Bacon, Jen; Easton, John Q.

TITLE Update: Ending Social Promotion--Passing, Retention, and Achievement among Promoted and Retained Students, 1995-1999. Charting Reform in Chicago Series: Data Brief.

INSTITUTION Consortium on Chicago School Research, IL.
PUB DATE 2000-09-00
NOTE 26p.; For Ending Social Promotion: Results from the First Two Years, see ED 439 214.
AVAILABLE FROM Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1313 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637 ($10). Tel: 773-702-3364; Fax: 773-702-2010; Web site: http://www.consortium-chicago.org.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Failure; Academic Standards; After School Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Grade Repetition; Grade 3; Grade 6; Grade 8; High Risk Students; *Social Promotion; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS Chicago Public Schools IL

ABSTRACT

This report examines the performance of students facing the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) policy to end social promotion in 1999. As the third group to face CPS promotional test cutoffs, they received more programmatic support than previous students. An afterschool program was expanded considerably, and many more at-risk students were required to participate. Some schools received additional teachers to reduce class size and support retained students. In 1998-99, retained students had a third chance to meet the test score cutoff. This update examines whether 1999 students showed improved performance. It also adds a new year of data for students facing the policy in 1997. In 1999, passing rates improved in the three grades examined. Despite this, retention rates did not fall. More at-risk 6th and 8th graders raised their test scores during the school year. Improvement in 3rd grade passing rates may have related to increasing retention rates in earlier grades. Retained students struggled in their second time through the policy. Nearly one-third of retained 8th graders in 1997 dropped out by 1999. More students maintained positive test trajectories 2 years after promotion. Students retained in 1997 were doing no better than previously socially promoted students. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 451 300

UPDATE: ENDING SOCIAL PROMOTION
PASSING, RETENTION, AND ACHIEVEMENT AMONG PROMOTED AND RETAINED STUDENTS 1995-1999

MELISSA RODERICK, JENNY NAGAOKA, JEN BACON, JOHN Q. EASTON

September 2000

CHARTING REFORM IN CHICAGO SERIES: DATA BRIEF
CONSORTIUM ON CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

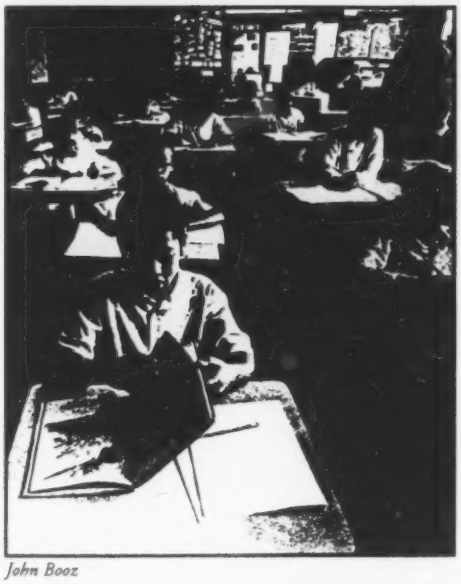
J. Q. Easton
Consortium on Chicago School Research

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ED 434080

Update: Ending Social Promotion



John Booz

PASSING, RETENTION, AND ACHIEVEMENT TRENDS AMONG PROMOTED AND RETAINED STUDENTS 1995-1999

MELISSA RODERICK
JENNY NAGAOKA
JEN BACON
JOHN Q. EASTON

SEPTEMBER 2000

In December 1999, the Consortium on Chicago School Research released *Ending Social Promotion: Results from the First Two Years.* That report looked at the progress of students who faced the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) promotional policy in 1997 and 1998 and compared their performance to a group of students in 1995 who did not face the policy. The report also examined the progress of the first group of students who were retained under the policy.

The first report established baseline indicators of student progress that we could chart over time. It looked at the proportion of students who met the test cutoffs at the end of the school year, at the end of the summer, and—for those who were retained—after a second time through the policy. It looked at test score trends for each of these three groups in the years before and after promotion or retention. By following these indicators, we hope to track the short- and long-term impacts of this policy on different groups of students.

This data brief has two goals. First, it examines the performance of students who faced the policy in 1999. This is the third group of students to face the CPS promotional test cutoffs, and this group received more programmatic support than did students in 1997 and 1998. During 1999, the Lighthouse after school program was expanded considerably, and many more at-risk students attended. Also, in 1999, all retained students were required to participate in Lighthouse, and some schools received additional teachers to reduce class sizes and give extra support to retained students. Finally, in 1998-1999, retained students were given

a third chance to meet the test score cutoff in January. While not intending to provide a rigorous evaluation of the impact of these initiatives, this update does ask the question: Is there evidence of improved performance for students in 1999 versus in prior years?

Second, this data brief adds a new year of data for students who faced the policy in 1997. We can now track the performance of third and sixth graders who faced the policy in 1997 over three years. For 1997 sixth graders, this means that we can examine what happened when they faced a second promotional gate in eighth grade. We can also look at two-year trends in dropout rates for eighth graders.

For a complete pdf copy or ordering information for *Ending Social Promotion: Results from the First Two Years*, visit the Consortium's website: **www.consortium-chicago.org**

I. In 1999, Passing Rates Improved in All Three Grades

The centerpiece of the CPS effort to end social promotion is a set of promotional test-score cutoffs for third, sixth, and eighth graders.[1] Students in these grades must meet minimum test scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) in reading and mathematics in order to be promoted to the next grade. In 1997, third graders needed to reach a 2.8 grade equivalent score in order to continue into the fourth grade. This cutoff is a full year below the 3.8 that would be considered "national average" for a student in the eighth month of the third grade.[2] The cutoff for sixth graders was set at 5.3, which is 1.5 years below grade level (6.8), and the cutoff for eighth graders was set at 7.0, fully 1.8 years below grade level (8.8) for that grade. In 1998, the cutoff for eighth grade was raised to 7.2 (1.6 years below grade level), and was again raised in 1999 to 7.4 (1.4 years below grade level). Cutoffs for third and sixth grades remained the same.[3]

Students are initially tested in May. Those who do not meet the test score cutoffs in May are required to participate in a six-week Summer Bridge Program and are retested at the end of the summer. If students do not meet the minimum test score in both subjects by the end of the summer, they are either retained or promoted despite not having met the cutoff.

Prior Finding:

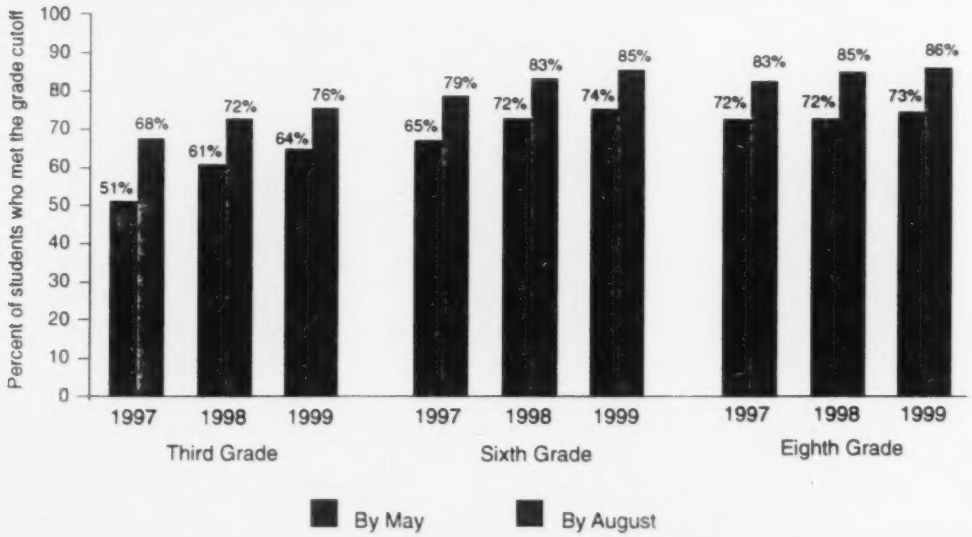
In 1997, 68 percent of third graders, 79 percent of sixth graders and 83 percent of eighth graders who were included under the policy met the cutoff in both reading and math by the end of the summer and were promoted. **Passing rates in all three grades went up in 1998.**

Update Finding:

Again in 1999, passing rates increased in all three grades (see Figure 1). By August 1999, 76 percent of third graders, 85 percent of sixth graders and 86 percent of eighth graders met the cutoffs in both reading and math for promotion. This is an 8 percentage point increase for third graders from 1997 and a 6 percentage point increase for sixth graders. Passing rates also improved among eighth graders, despite the fact that eighth graders faced a higher cutoff (7.4 vs. 7.0). **Most of these improvements are due to improved passing rates during the school year rather than during Summer Bridge.**

Figure 1

Passing Rates: 1997-1999

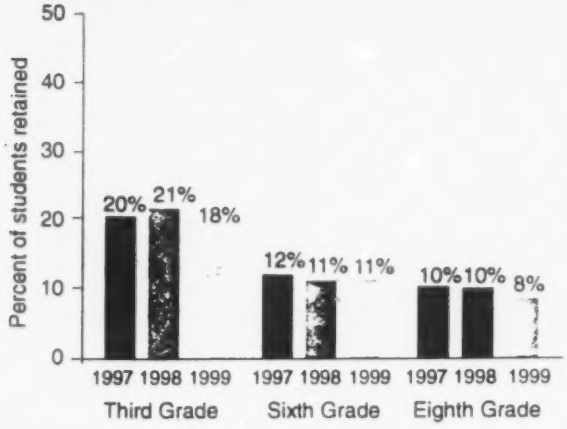


Note: Passing rates refer to the percentage of students who meet the test score cutoff. Promotion means advancing to the next grade (whether or not the cutoff is met).

II. Despite Higher Passing Rates, Retention Rates Have Not Fallen

Figure 2

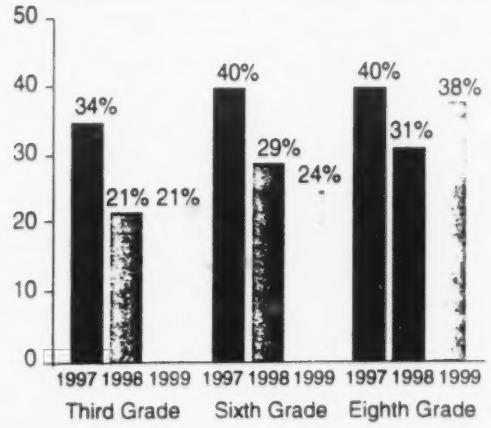
Retention Rates: 1997-1999



Note: This graph is limited to students who are included under the policy. See Endnote 1 for details.

Figure 3

Proportion Promoted Among Students Who Failed to Meet Cutoffs 1997-1999



Prior Finding:

In 1997, 20 percent of included third graders, 12 percent of included sixth graders and 10 percent of included eighth graders were retained or sent to Transition Centers.[4] Largely because many students were promoted despite having test scores below the cutoff, retention rates were significantly lower than the proportion of students who did not meet the test score cutoffs by the end of the summer. In 1997, approximately one-third of third graders and 40 percent of sixth and eighth graders who failed to meet the test cutoff in both mathematics and reading were promoted anyway.

Update Finding:

In 1999, 18 percent of included third graders, 11 percent of included sixth graders and 8 percent of included eighth graders were retained or sent to Transition Centers (see Figure 2). **Thus, higher passing rates are not translating into lower retention rates.** For example, the number of third graders who met the cutoff at the end of the summer increased by 8 percentage points from 1997 to 1999, but retention rates declined only by 2 percentage points. The reason for this is that fewer students who do not meet the cutoff are promoted.[5] In 1997, 34 percent of third graders who did not make the cutoff were promoted (waived), compared to only 21 percent in 1999 (see Figure 3).

III. More At-Risk Sixth and Eighth Graders Are Raising Their Test Scores During the School Year

In 1996-1997 the first group of third, sixth, and eighth graders faced the CPS promotional criteria. Our first report compared the performance of students in this and subsequent years to results from CPS students in May 1995 who were not subject to the promotional criteria. Since students in 1995 took the ITBS without it counting toward promotion, they provide a reference group for what we would expect in the absence of the policy.[6]

We also looked at students' performance by their risk under the policy. We defined students as high risk if, based on their prior test score trajectories, they would need to increase their ITBS reading scores by 1.5 grade equivalents (GEs) or more in a gate year to meet the test cutoff. A student was defined as moderate risk if he or she would need to have average to above average (.5 to 1.5 GEs) increases in a year in order to meet the cutoff.

Prior Finding:

In 1997, many more sixth and eighth graders were reaching the minimum test score cutoffs for promotion than in 1995. Much of this increase occurred during Summer Bridge. In 1995, before the policy, only 63 percent of sixth graders had ITBS scores of 5.3 or higher before they were promoted to the seventh grade. During the first year of the policy, 1997, 70 percent of sixth graders obtained the necessary score in May, and 83 percent did so by the end of the summer. **Thus, the proportion of sixth graders who reached at least a 5.3 on the ITBS was 20 percentage points higher in 1995 than in 1997.** Results were similar for eighth graders.

Given the number of students who could be considered at risk of failing to meet the testing cutoffs, these passing rates were impressive. In the sixth grade, we considered 14 percent of students to be at high risk in reading and an additional 24 percent to be at moderate risk. In the eighth grade, 18 percent of students were considered at high-risk in reading and an additional 19 percent at moderate risk. The report found that students with the lowest skills saw the greatest improvements in passing rates, particularly after Summer Bridge. Prior to the policy, very few high-risk students managed to increase their ITBS scores by 1.5 GEs or more in one year. In 1995, for example, only 4 percent of high-risk sixth graders were able to reach a 5.3. But in 1997, 34 percent of high-risk sixth graders managed to reach a 5.3 or higher in both subjects; again most of this occurred over the summer. The proportion of moderate-risk sixth graders who reached 5.3 was 41 percent in 1995 and 76 percent in 1997. For moderate-risk eighth graders, the proportion who reached a 7.0 increased from 45 percent in 1995 to 86 percent in 1997.

Update Finding:

Passing rates were higher in 1999 both because there were fewer at-risk students in the sixth and eighth grades and because the at-risk students in those grades were doing better. Reflecting an overall rise in test scores in the Chicago Public Schools, there has been a slight decline (3-4 percentage points) in the number of high-risk sixth and eighth graders. The performance of these students during the year in which they faced the promotional policy, moreover, was substantially better in 1999 than in 1997 (see Figures 4 and 5 on next page). In 1997, only 9 percent of high-risk sixth graders were able to reach a 5.3 in reading by May. In 1999 it was 17 percent. While many more students are passing during the school year, the overall passing rates, which include both school year and summer results, improved only slightly (from 34 to 36 percent for high-risk sixth graders and from 83 to 86 percent for all sixth graders). Again, eighth grade results are similar.

Figure 4

Percent of Sixth Graders Reaching the 5.3 Cutoff in Reading by Risk Category
1995, 1997, and 1999

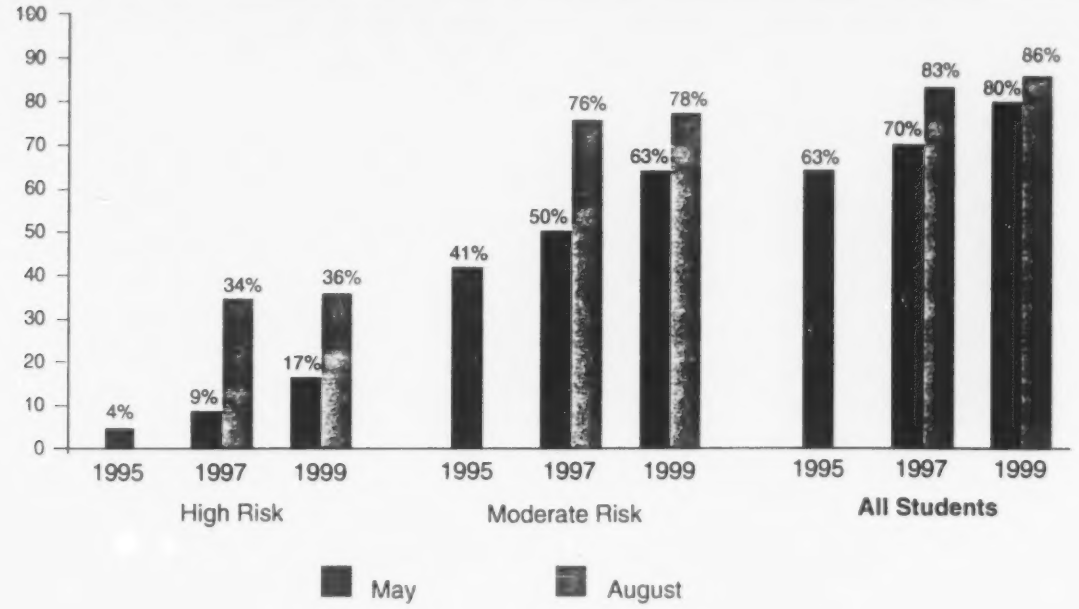
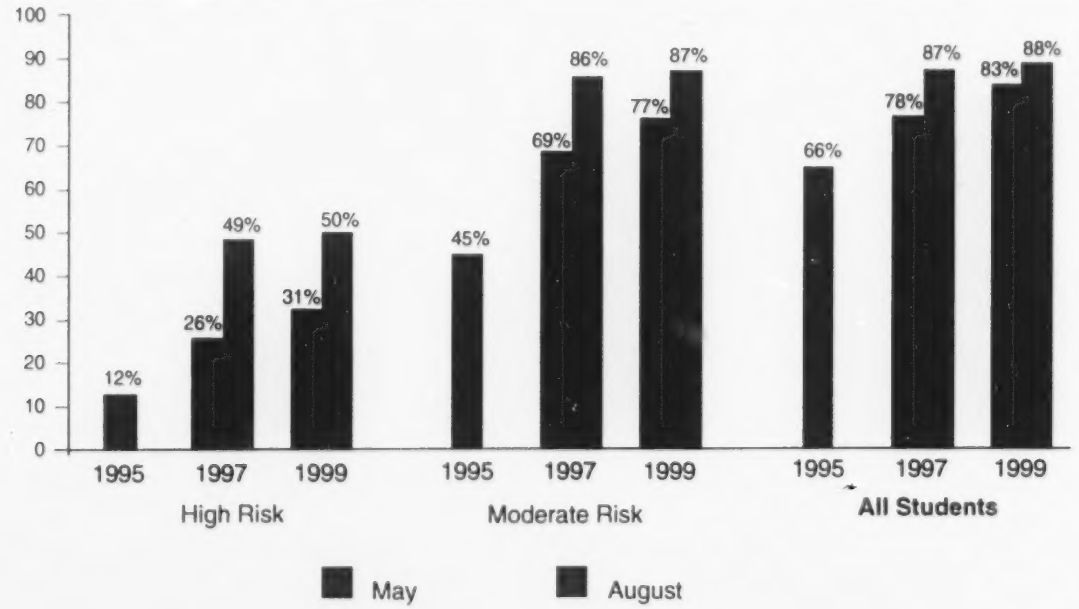


Figure 5

Percent of Eighth Graders Reaching the Cutoff in Reading by Risk Category
1995, 1997, and 1999



IV. Improvement in Third-Grade Passing Rates May Be Due to Increasing Retention Rates in Earlier Grades

Prior finding:

An important finding in the first report was that the policy seemed to have less positive effects in the third grade than in the sixth and eighth grades. The proportion of third graders who scored a 2.8 or higher during the school year increased only slightly between 1995 and 1997, with no change among high-risk students. Summer Bridge, however, was effective in increasing the proportion of third graders who met minimum test scores before promotion.

Update finding:

More third graders were able to meet the minimum test score cutoff in 1999. Some of this improvement is because of better performance among more moderately at-risk students, but some is also due to a drop in the number of third graders with very low test scores. Between 1997 and 1998, there was a substantial drop in the proportion of third graders who entered that grade at risk under the policy (see Figure 6). Overall, the number of high- and moderate-risk third graders in reading declined by 10 percentage points in 1998. Since test scores have been rising over time, this could be good news. But part of this decline might also be due to increases in retention rates in the earlier grades. The proportion of students who are retained in kindergarten through second grade started to rise in 1996 and has continued to do so (see Figure 7 on next page). Thus, an unanticipated effect of the policy might be that teachers and schools are becoming more inclined to retain students in grades not affected by the policy. We will continue to track the effects of this rise in early retention.

The proportion of moderate-risk third graders meeting the test score cutoff before promotion was higher in both 1998 and 1999 (see Figure 8 on next page). However, there was no improvement for high risk students during the school year. Thus, much of the improvement in passing rates in the third grade in 1999 appears to be attributable to decreases in the proportion of incoming third graders with low test scores, not to better performance among students with low skills.

Figure 6

Percent Third Graders at Risk in Reading
1997-1999

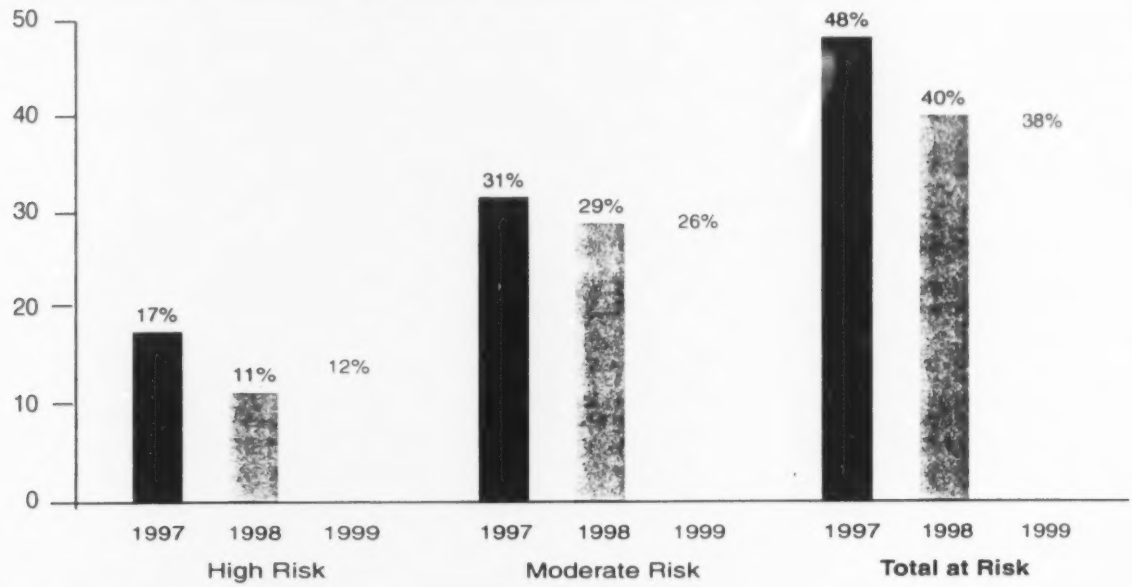
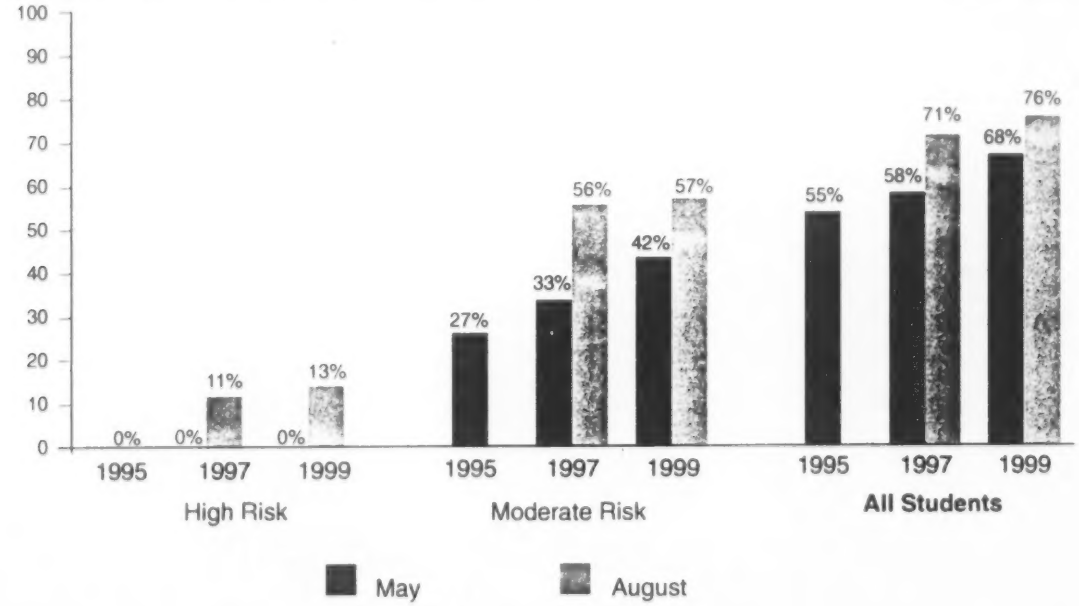


Figure 7

Retention Patterns in Early Grades

Figure 8

Percent of Third Graders Reaching the 2.8 Cutoff in Reading by Risk Category
1995, 1997, and 1999



What Happens to Students Retained in First and Second Grades When They Face the Policy in the Third Grade?

The rise in early grade retention raises concern that many students retained in the early grades will struggle when they reach the promotion policy in the third grade. Students who were retained in the first grade in 1995 or 1996, and those retained in the second grade in 1995, 1996 or 1997, have faced the promotion policy in the third grade. What happened to these students?

First, many students who were retained in the early grades were excluded from the policy or had left the system by the time they reached third grade. In 1997, for example, 1,398 second graders were retained. By spring 1999, when these students should have been in third grade, only 55 percent were included under the policy. Thirty-four percent were in third grade but were excluded from the policy, seven percent had left the Chicago Public Schools, and two percent were still in second grade. For those students who were included, however, many did not make it to the test score cutoffs, even after Summer Bridge. In 1999, 33 percent of third graders who had been retained the year before, in second grade, and were included under the policy were retained again. This means that these students experienced retentions in two consecutive grades. Over the past several years, we see that approximately 20 percent of all first and second graders who are retained are experiencing a second retention in the third grade. While these are small numbers, this trend is troubling. Experiencing two retentions by third grade means that these students, by definition, will be unable to graduate from eighth grade because they will turn 15 in the seventh grade and will have to go to Transition Centers.

Third-Grade Outcomes for Students Retained in Earlier Grades

	First-Grade Retainees		
	1995	**1996**	**1997***
Total retained in first grade	1,133	1,412	2,078
Number and percent included in policy in third grade	485 43%	682 48%	N/A
Number and percent of included students retained in third grade	188 39%	266 39%	N/A N/A
	Second-Grade Retainees		
	1995	**1996**	**1997**
Total retained in second grade	662	910	1,398
Number and percent included in policy in third grade	295 45%	469 52%	770 55%
Number and percent of included students retained in third grade	105 36%	207 44%	251 33%

*These students had not yet reached third grade in 1999.

V. Retained Students Are Struggling in Their Second Time Through the Policy

Under the CPS policy, students who are retained must try to reach the same promotional test cutoffs again. Some students are exempted from the policy in this retained year by being placed in one of the exclusion categories (i.e., special education), but those who are not excluded must take the ITBS again and meet the same test criteria. Students who don't meet the criteria are again sent to Summer Bridge, where they take the test for a fourth time. Students who are still unable to reach the cutoffs can be retained a second time.

Prior finding:

The first report tracked the progress of students who were retained after August 1997 during their second year in that grade.

Few students who were retained in 1997 made adequate progress the next year. After two years in the same grade and a second Summer Bridge, only 43 percent of retained third graders and 47 percent of retained sixth graders were able to raise their test scores to the promotional cutoffs. Passing rates were lowest among retained eighth graders because so many of these students dropped out.

Update finding:

Students who were retained in 1998 had an extra chance to meet the test cutoffs in January, and approximately one-quarter met the cutoff on this new testing date. Even with this extra chance, however, the performance of retained students was only slightly better than in 1997 (see Figure 9). After two years in the same grade and two summers in Summer Bridge, 53 percent of third graders retained in 1998 were able to meet the test score cutoffs, compared with 43 percent of third graders retained in 1997. For retained sixth graders, the number rose from 47 percent in 1997 to 55 percent in 1998. The performance of retained and Transition Center eighth graders was again an area of concern. Only about 38 percent of eighth graders who were retained or sent to Transition Centers in 1998 were able to raise their scores to the test cutoff by August.

One of the reasons that the progress of retained eighth graders looks so dismal is that many of these students are beginning to drop out of school as they reach the minimum age of 16. **The one-year dropout rate for retained or Transition Center eighth graders was roughly comparable in both 1998 and 1999.**

Figure 9

Trends for Students Retained in 1997 and 1998

	Third Grade		Sixth Grade		Eighth Grade	
	1997	1998	1997	1998	1997	1998
Retained	5,551	5,408	3,581	3,004	2,990	2,984
Passed in January the next year	N/A	1,219 (23%)	N/A	737 (25%)	164 (5%)	747 (25%)
Passed by May the next year	1,764 (32%)	2,445 (45%)	1,204 (34%)	1,380 (46%)	754 (25%)	995 (33%)
Passed by August the next year	2,381 (43%)	2,869 (53%)	1,688 (47%)	1,663 (55%)	1,119 (34%)	1,136 (38%)
Promoted	3,731 (67%)	3,839 (71%)	2,491 (69%)	2,191(73%)	1,547 (52%)	1,559 (52%)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE 1

VI. Nearly a Third of Retained Eighth Graders in 1997 Had Dropped Out by Fall 1999

Prior findings:

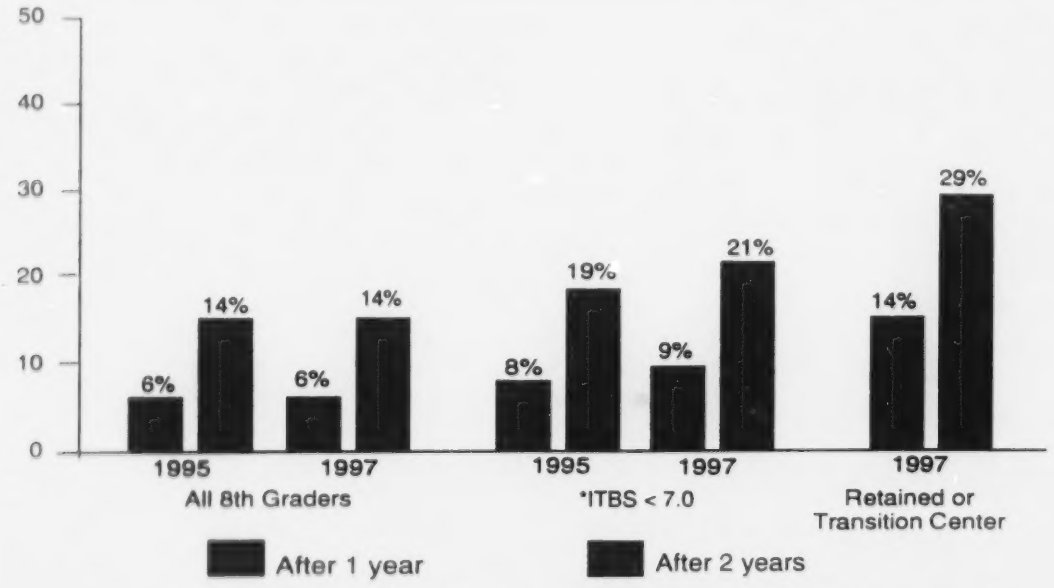
One of the arguments against retaining students is that such policies place students at high risk of school dropout. In the prior report, we compared one-year dropout rates for students in 1997 to those of the pre-policy 1995 cohort. We looked specifically at the dropout rates for those students who were socially promoted in 1995 (those students who would not have made a 7.0 cutoff if it had been in place) to that of students in 1997 who did not make the test score cutoff at the end of the summer, many of whom were retained. We found no appreciable difference in the overall one-year dropout rate between eighth graders in 1995 and 1997, even though 14 percent of the students who were retained or were sent to Transition Centers had dropped out.

Update finding:

There is no appreciable difference in the dropout rate among all eighth graders from 1995 to 1997. Two-year dropout rates for low achieving students in the 1997 cohort (ITBS < 7.0), however, were slightly higher than for students in 1995 (see Figure 10). Of particular concern is the high dropout rate among students who were retained or sent to transition centers in 1997. By the end of 1999, fully 29 percent of students who were retained or sent to Transition Centers in 1997 had dropped out. This is consistent with other findings showing that overall dropout rates are stable, though students may be dropping out in earlier grades.

Figure 10

Dropout Rates of Eighth Graders Retained in 1995 and 1997
After One and Two Years



*This category includes all students who did not meet the 7.0 cutoff, regardless of whether they were promoted or retained.

VII. More Students Maintained Positive Test Trajectories Two Years after Promotion

Increases in the proportion of students who meet the promotional cutoff score are only meaningful if those gains are maintained over time. In 1999, we now have two years of post-promotional data for the original group of students who faced the policy in the spring of 1997. We use student achievement trends from 1995 as our comparison for what we would have expected in the absence of the policy.

1. Students who met the test criteria their first time through a promotional gate grade in May 1997 have comparable learning trends to the smaller group of students who would have passed if they had faced the criteria in 1995.

Seventy percent of included sixth graders in 1997 reached the test score cutoff their first time (May 97). Their learning trends over three years are quite comparable to the smaller group (63 percent of 1995 sixth graders) who had reached a 5.3 or higher in May 1995 (see Figure 11 on page 15). We see testing gains of about 3.0 GEs over the three years for which we have ITBS data among both groups.

2. Students who reached the testing cutoffs after Summer Bridge maintained their testing gains over the next two years.

An additional thirteen percent of 1997 sixth graders met the test cutoffs at the end of the summer. They did so by having above average learning gains over the summer. Following this same group of students over three years, it now looks like Summer Bridge produced a one time increase in their test scores that allowed these students to remain on track. Over the three years between fifth and eighth grade, these students also increased their ITBS scores 3.0 GEs, compared to 2.7 GEs for students in 1995 who were socially promoted.[7]

To summarize, more students are being kept on track under the policy than before its implementation. In 1997, 83 percent of sixth graders who were included under the policy reached the test criteria in May or August. Their learning gains two years after policy implementation are comparable to the 63 percent of students who scored a 5.3 or higher on the ITBS in 1995, when this score was not a promotional criterion. We see similar trends among third graders (see Figures 13 and 14 on pages 17-18).[8]

How to read Figure 11

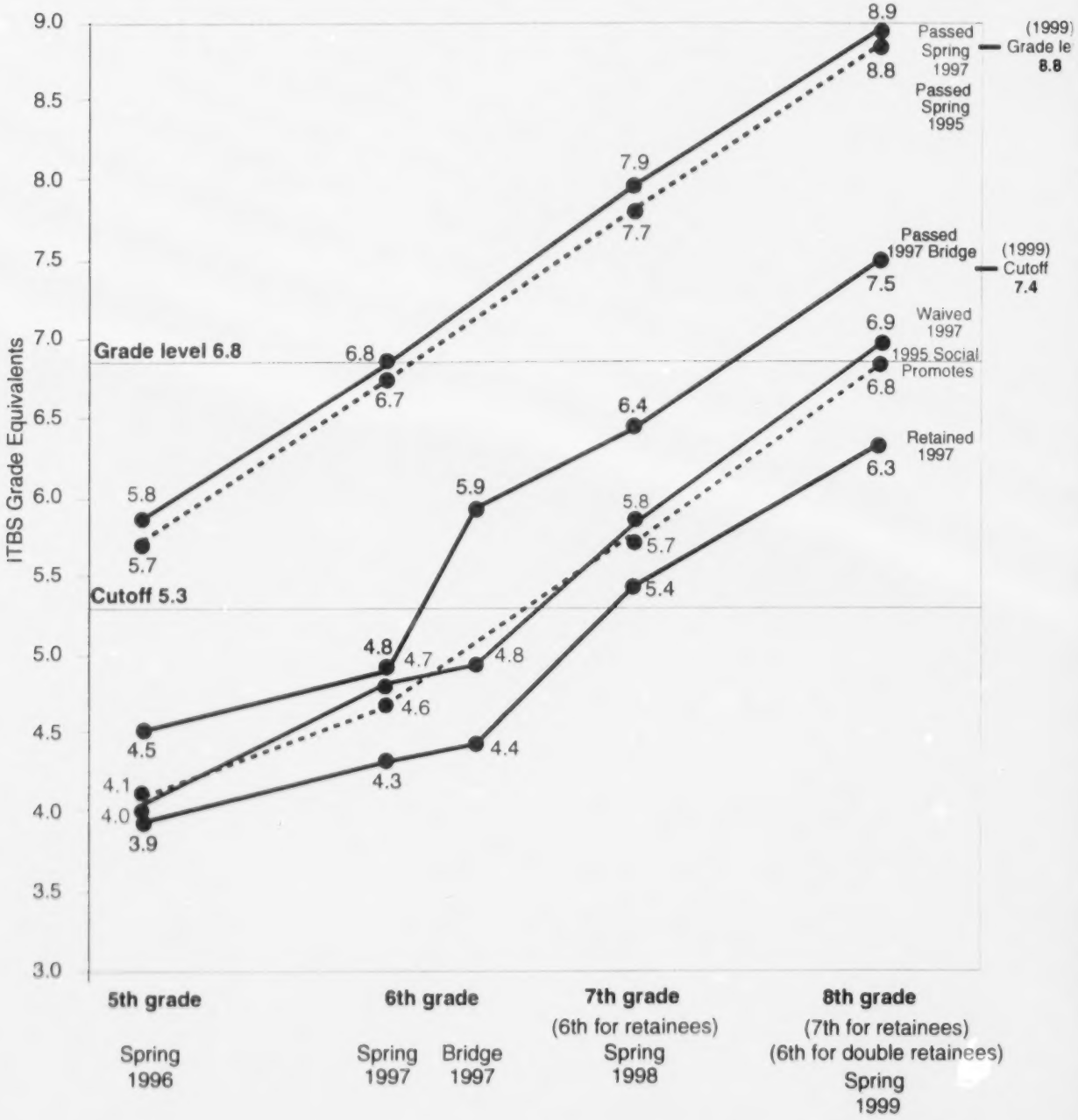
Figure 11 tracks the ITBS scores of sixth-grade students according to their outcomes under the promotional policy. The dashed lines represent the test score trends for our two main comparison groups: (1) Students in 1995 who would have met the test score cutoff had it been in place **("Passed Spring 1995")** and (2) Students in 1995 who would not have met the test score cutoff and were promoted **("1995 Social Promotes")**.

The remaining four lines track the learning gains of sixth graders, who, in 1997: (1) Met the cutoff in May **("Passed Spring 1997")** (2) Met the test score cutoff at the end of Summer Bridge **("Passed 1997 Bridge")** (3) Did not meet the test score cutoff and were promoted anyway **("Waived 1997")** and (4) were retained in 1997 **("Retained 1997")**. The retained 1997 line is an average of the learning trends of all retained students. Some of these students were retained once, some twice, and some passed after a January test. The learning gains of subgroups of these retained students are reported in Figure 12.

For example, the top line represents the average ITBS reading scores (in GEs) of students who took the ITBS in spring 1997 and reached the test score cutoff of 5.3 **("Passed spring 1997")**. That group of students (65 percent of the total) gained 3.1 GEs during the three years between the end of fifth grade and the end of eighth grade (from 5.8 to 8.9).

Figure 11

Three-Year Growth in ITBS Reading Scores
Sixth Graders in 1999 Compared with 1996



Note: An important debate in research on retention is whether we should compare the performance of retained to promoted students at the same age or after the same grade. This chart focuses on an across-age comparison. The other type of comparison focuses on the performance of students in the same grade who have been exposed to the same material. If such a comparison were made, it would look like retained students were doing better than socially promoted students in 1995.

Figure 12

Three-Year Learning Trends for First Time Sixth Graders

		Three year growth (GEs)	Three year growth (Rasch metric)
Passed May 1995	(n=11,801)	3.1	1.8
Passed May 1997	(n=13,338)	3.1	1.8
Socially Promoted 1995	(n=7,129)	2.7	1.8
Passed after Bridge	(n=2,689)	3.0	1.8
Waived	(n=857)	2.9	1.8
All Retained	(n=1,641)	2.4	1.5
Retained once	(n=1,373)	2.5	1.6
January promote	(n=145)	2.3	1.5
Retained twice	(n=123)	1.5	0.9

Note: Students who did not take the Summer Bridge test in 1997 are not included in the waived and retained groups in Figures 11 and 12. The numbers in Figures 11 and 12 reflect scores for students who had spring ITBS scores from 1996 to 1999 (1994 to 1997 for the 1995 comparison group). The numbers are slightly different from those reported in Figures 2-8 and 2-9 of the prior report because some students had left the system in the next year or were not tested in the next year, and thus did not have four time points. For comparability over time, these figures exclude the test scores of students who left or were not tested in the next year. In the sixth grade, for the "Passed Spring 97" group, 87 percent had all four spring test scores, as did 82 percent of the "Passed 1997 Bridge" group, 76 percent of the "Waived 1997" group and 70 percent of the "Retained 1997" group. For the 1995 comparison groups, 81 percent of the "Passed Spring 1995" and 75 percent of the "1995 Social Promotes" groups have all four spring test scores. A comparison of the relative learning trends of students graphed and not graphed suggested that those students who left did not differ dramatically from those included.

To download a copy of this report in pdf format, visit the Consortium's website: **www.consortium-chicago.org**

Figure 13

Three-Year Growth in ITBS Reading Scores
Third Graders in 1999 Compared with 1995

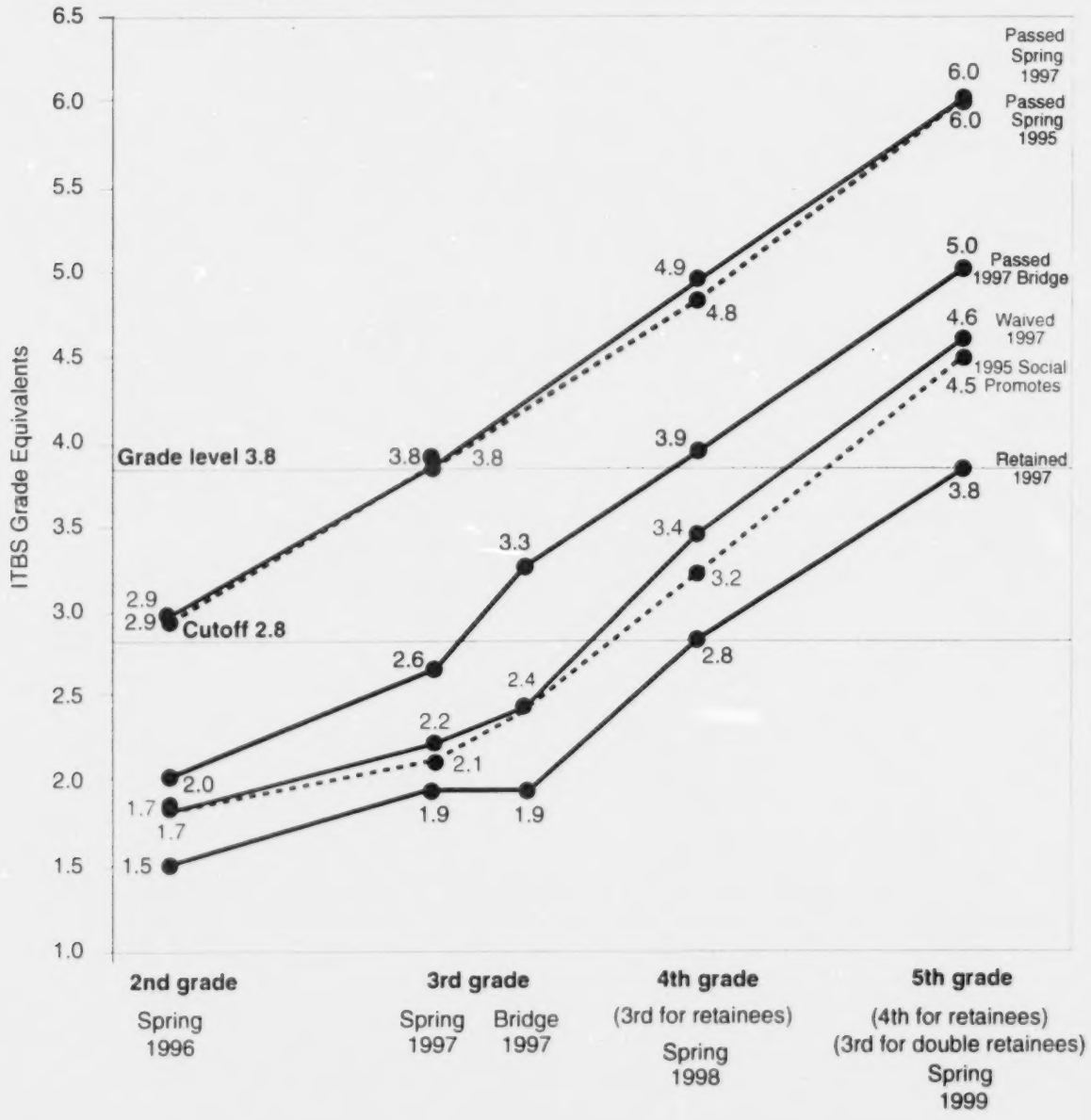


Figure 14

Three-Year Learning Trends for First-Time Third Graders

		Three year growth (GEs)	Three year growth (Rasch logits)
Passed May 1995	(n=8,857)	3.1	1.6
Passed May 1997	(n=9,008)	3.1	1.5
Socially Promoted 1995	(n=8,668)	2.7	1.6
Passed after Bridge	(n=2,791)	3.0	1.6
Waived	(n=1,024)	2.8	1.6
All Retained	(n=2,364)	2.3	1.6
Retained once	(n=1,860)	2.5	1.6
Retained twice/ passed in January	(n=262)	2.2	1.4
Retained twice	(n=242)	1.5	1.3

Note: Students who did not take the Summer Bridge test in 1997 are not included in the waived and retained groups in Figures 13 and 14. The numbers in Figures 13 and 14 reflect scores for students who had spring ITBS scores from 1996 to 1999 (1994 to 1997 for the 1995 comparison group). The numbers are slightly different from those reported in Figures 2-8 and 2-9 of the prior report because some students had left the system in the next year or were not tested in the next year, and thus did not have four time points. For comparability over time, these Figures exclude the test scores of students who left or were not tested in the next year. In the third grade, 78 percent of the the "Passed Spring 1997," group had all four spring test scores, as did 74 percent of the "Passed 1997 Bridge" group, 65 percent of the "Waived 1997" and 64 percent of the "Retained 1997" group. For the 1995 comparison groups, 73 percent of the "Passed Spring 1995" group and 71 percent of the "1995 Social Promotes" group have all four test scores.

VIII. Students Retained in 1997 Are Doing No Better Than Previously Socially Promoted Students

Prior finding

The last report found that students who were retained in 1997 were not doing any better than students who were previously socially promoted. The achievement trends of both groups showed that these students were falling farther behind their counterparts.

Update finding:

If we look only at ITBS grade equivalents, three-year learning trends suggest that retained students are showing smaller achievement gains than previously socially promoted students. Sixth graders who were socially promoted in 1995 gained 2.7 GEs over the three years between the end of fifth grade and the end of eighth grade (see Figure 12 on page 16). Students who were retained in 1997, however, gained only 2.4 GEs on average during this three-year period. We see a similar trend among third graders. Third graders who were retained in 1997 gained only 2.3 GEs, on average, over the course of three years. Achievement trends among students who were retained in both 1997 and 1998 are particularly troubling. Between the year before their first retention and their third time through the grade (a three-year period), the ITBS reading scores of double-retained third graders in 1997 increased only 1.5 GEs.

A recognized problem with grade equivalents, however, is that scores are dependent upon the level of the test taken. In general, students will receive higher scores simply by taking a higher level of the test. So, just taking a fourth-grade test will probably result in a higher score than taking a third-grade test. When we compare students who are retained to those who are promoted, we are comparing students who took a fourth-grade test—and in the case of double retained students a third-grade test—to the students who took a fifth-grade test.

In order to reduce the impact of these test level effects, the Consortium on Chicago School Research equated forms and levels of the ITBS test so that test scores and gains are comparable across levels and forms of the test. The equating used a technique called Rasch analysis.

Figures 12 and 14 show three-year growth for retained and previously socially promoted students in both GEs and in the equated Rasch metric—the logit.[9] Even when we adjust for the fact that students are taking different forms of the test, it looks like sixth graders who are retained, and particularly those who are double retained, have smaller learning gains over three years than previously socially promoted students. This is not true in the third grade, however. In the third grade, once we have accounted for grade level effects of the test, retained third graders have learning gains about equal to previously socially promoted students. Double-retained third graders have lower gains than the previous social promotes but not as much lower as the GE metric would suggest. Between second grade and two years after promotion or retention, socially promoted students in 1995 gained 1.6 logits, compared to 1.6 for third graders retained once and 1.3 for third graders retained twice. Because of measurement problems (in both GEs and logits) caused by measurement error among the lowest performing young students, we cannot yet conclude that retention is having significant negative effects on achievement, but in neither comparison are retained students doing better.

In both comparisons, students with double retentions seem to be struggling. What happened to these students after their double retention? Despite their relatively flat test trajectories, more than three-quarters of the double-retained third graders were promoted and 10 percent were placed in special education (see Figure 15, next page). Among sixth and eighth graders, many left the school system or dropped out the following year, particularly in the eighth grade where 10 percent left the system, and 30 percent dropped out.

Figure 15

What Happened to Double Retainees by 1999?

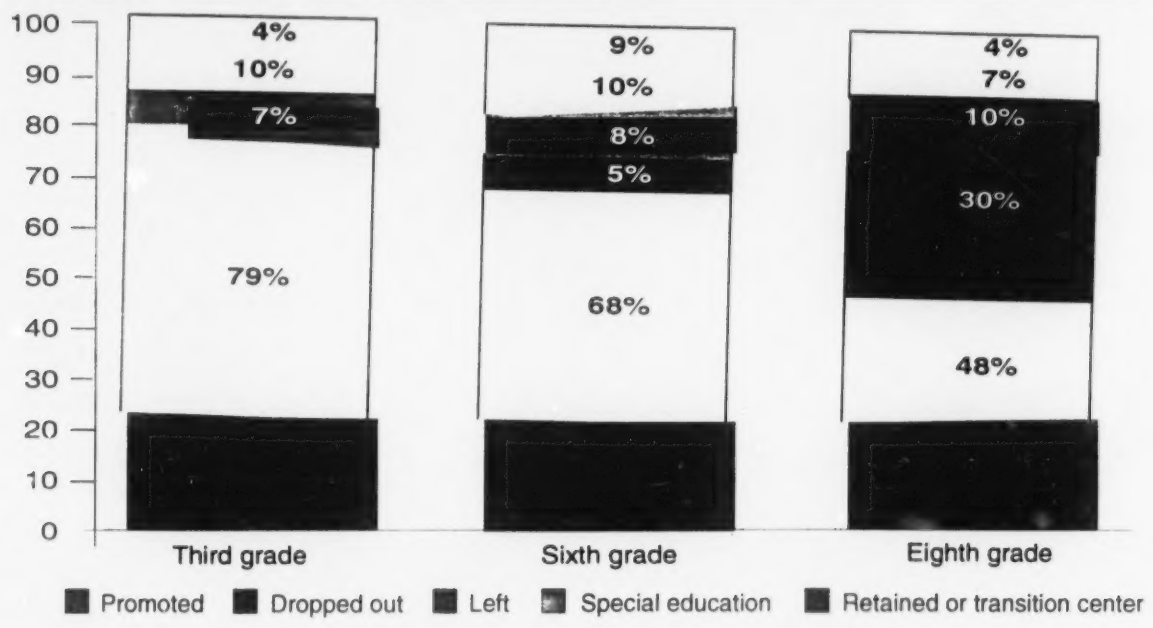
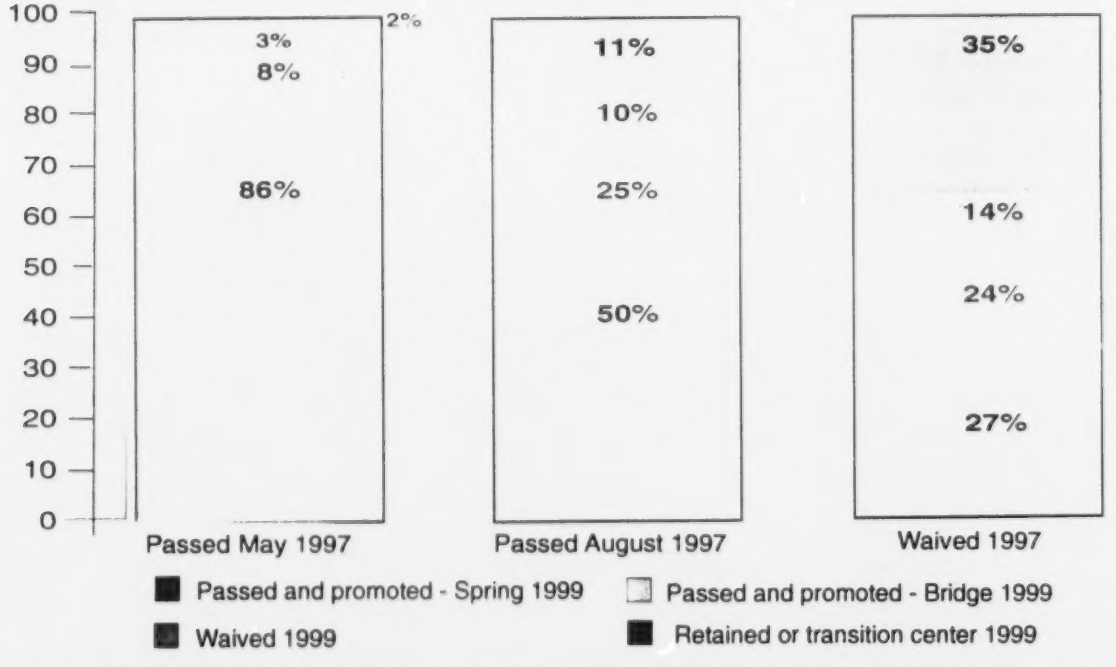


Figure 16

What Happened to Sixth Graders Promoted in 1997?



Note: Students who left the CPS system between 1997 and 1999 are not included in this chart. Some of these students probably transferred into private high schools. Others dropped out or moved to other school districts.

IX: What Happens When Students Reach Their Second Promotional Gate?

A primary argument for ending social promotion is that ensuring that students have the requisite skills before promotion will increase their chances of long-term school success. Sixth graders who faced the policy in 1997 and were promoted faced the policy again in 1999 as eighth graders. What happened to these students their second time through the policy?

Almost 86 percent of sixth graders who met the promotional cutoff in May 1997 did so again when they reached eighth grade in 1999 (see Figure 16). Excluding students who left the school system after eighth grade, 94 percent of students who met the cutoff the first time in sixth grade also met the cutoff when they reached the eighth-grade gate.

There are two groups of sixth grade students who were promoted in 1997 whose future performance is of special concern. First are those students who passed the test score criterion after Summer Bridge and were then promoted. Second are the students who did not meet the test cutoff, yet were promoted for other reasons.

The first group, students who were promoted into sixth grade after reaching the test cutoff in Summer Bridge, did relatively well when they reached eighth grade. Although almost half of them did have to attend Summer Bridge after eighth grade, 75 percent of this group passed the test criterion by August and fully 85 percent were promoted.

The second group of students—those who were promoted to sixth grade in 1997 without reaching the test cutoff—did not do as well. Only 27 percent met the eighth grade test cutoff in May 1999, and slightly over half did so by the end of the summer. In the end, over one-third of sixth graders who were promoted despite not meeting the test cutoff in 1997 were retained or sent to Transition Centers at the end of eighth grade in 1999.

Endnotes

[1] This update presents results only for those students included under the policy. In 1997, the CPS decided that the promotional decisions for two groups of students in these grades would not be made solely on the basis of scores on the ITBS–students who were in bilingual education fewer than three years and students who were in graded special education classrooms. In 1997, that meant that only 70 percent of third graders and 80 percent of sixth and eighth graders were "included" under the policy. In 1998 and 1999, exclusion and inclusion rates were roughly similar.

[2] The terms "grade level" and "national average" are often used interchangeably though both have limitations. Grade level implies that grade specific learning standards have been measured, which is not the case with norm-referenced tests. National average implies an up-to-date average, though CPS uses norms from 1988.

[3] The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills measures student achievement in grade equivalents (GEs) according to national norms. Test publishers provide fall, winter, and spring norms, with the spring norms matched to the eighth month of the school year. Therefore, a score of a student's grade plus eight months (e.g. 3.8 for third grade) is considered at the national average. In CPS, with school opening in late August and testing occuring in early May, the test date is moving closer to the ninth month of the school year.

[4] Transition Centers are new alternative schools designed specifically for CPS students who reach the age of 15 before graduating from the eighth grade. According to the policy, students cannot attend regular elementary school once they have turned fifteen. Instead, they complete their retention year, or any other elementary grade, at a Transition Center.

[5] In this report we calculate the number of students who failed to meet the stated promotional criteria at the end of the summer and were promoted the next year. We can infer that most of the students who were promoted despite not meeting the test score cutoff received waivers. See the original report for a discussion of the waiver policy.

[6] Please see *Ending Social Promotion: Results from the First Two Years*, page 26, for a discussion of issues that affect pre- and post-policy comparisons.

[7] We call students socially promoted in 1995 if their ITBS test scores at the end of sixth grade would not have allowed them to meet the promotional criteria of 5.3 if it had been in place. Thus, these students were promoted despite their low test scores, while in 1997 these students would have been required to attend Summer Bridge.

[8] We do not report two year testing trends for eighth graders, since these students stop taking the ITBS after eighth grade, and we have no comparable score to track these students' gains.

[9] One advantage of the logit over the GE is that it permits more accurate measurement of achievement growth from year to year. Whereas the GE by definition shows an average growth rate of 1.0 GEs for every grade, the logit typically shows greater gains in earlier grades as compared to higher grades. Because the GE is the "coin of the realm" in CPS, we conducted all of our initial analyses using this metric. We also have replicated all analyses using the Rasch logit. We only report the findings in logits when they are discrepant from the GE results.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This report reflects the interpretations of its authors. Although the Consortium's Steering Committee provided technical advice and reviewed an earlier version of the report, no formal endorsement by these individuals, their organizations, or the Consortium should be assumed.

Steering Committee

Victoria Chou, Co-Chair
University of Illinois at Chicago

James H. Lewis, Co-Chair
Roosevelt University

Institutional Members

Chicago Public Schools
Christy Carter
for the Chicago Board of Education

Olivia Watkins
for the Chief Executive Officer

Philip Hansen
Accountability Office

Academic Accountability Council
Vacant

Illinois State Board of Education
Connie Wise
for the Superintendent

Individual Members

John Ayers
Leadership for Quality Education

Gina Burkhardt
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

Michael E. Carl
Northeastern Illinois University

Molly A. Carroll
Chicago Teachers Union

Louis M. Gomez
Northwestern University

Anne C. Hallett
Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

G. Alfred Hess, Jr.
Northwestern University

Rachel W. Lindsey
Chicago State University

George Lowery
Roosevelt University

Angela Perez Miller
DePaul University

Donald R. Moore
Designs for Change

Sharon Ransom
University of Illinois at Chicago

Barbara A. Sizemore
DePaul University

Linda S. Tafel
National-Louis University

Beverly Tunney
Chicago Principals and Administrators Association

Quintin Vargas, III
DePaul University

Consortium on Chicago School Research

Mission

The Consortium on Chicago School Research is an independent federation of Chicago area organizations that conducts research on ways to improve Chicago's public schools and assess the progress of school improvement and reform. Formed in 1990, it is a multipartisan organization that includes faculty from area universities, leadership from the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Teachers Union, education advocacy groups, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, as well as other key civic and professional leaders.

The Consortium does not argue a particular policy position. Rather, it believes that good policy is most likely to result from a genuine competition of ideas informed by the best evidence that can be obtained.

Directors

Anthony S. Bryk
University of Chicago

John Q. Easton
Consortium on Chicago School Research

Albert L. Bennett
Roosevelt University

Melissa Roderick
University of Chicago

Penny Bender Sebring
University of Chicago

Mark A. Smylie
University of Illinois at Chicago

Consortium on Chicago School Research
1313 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637
773-702-3364 773-702-2010 - fax
www.consortium-chicago.org